

Knowing Bodies

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My stepfather told me that the hardest thing after my mother died was the ancient food freezer in the basement. "It's the pies I can't bear to look at," he explained. I [Dennis] offered to help. Of course, when confronted with those pies I didn't know what to do. My mother would have wanted us to eat them. But somehow this did not present itself as a possibility. Could we keep them frozen forever? How weird would it be to keep a pie?

What and how we know, it seems, is always mediated by our perceptions of and identifications with objects of the world. That is why the process of grieving for loved ones includes a meditation on what has organized and mediated our relations with them. Things like pies.

In his book *Ethical Know-How* Francisco Varela (1999) suggests that "The world is not something that is given to us but something we engage in by moving, touching, breathing, eating" (p. 9). He calls this "cognition as enaction," pointing to the way our understanding of ourselves emerges from our concrete and situated experiences of the world.

Now, this seems an entirely sensible theory of knowledge. Anyone who has been in the presence of young children knows full well the

importance of physical exploration for the development of knowledge and understanding. Other forms of knowing are also clearly “in the body”—pianists, for example, will speak about how the music is “in their fingers.” It is not unusual for an adult pianist, when confronted with what appears to be an unfamiliar musical score, to begin playing from the score only to discover that the music has been played before, and that while the mind forgets, the fingers “remember.”

To some extent, as adults we also have *daily* evidence of our need to know ourselves, others, and our contexts through our embodied relations. What seems difficult for us to grasp are the complex ways that what we identify as “knowledge” is intimately attached to both what we experience as our environment (context) and as our own personal physical bodies. Although there continues to be an obsession with the state of the biological body, there also continues to be a pervasive ignorance about the complex ways biological and phenomenological bodies interact to create what becomes noticed and deployed as “knowing.”

Of course, it’s not just the world that becomes marked on our bodies; it is the way in which we human subjects make our mark on the world. That we have developed ways to remember and represent our experiences and interpretations with language has offered us the opportunity to not only make these linguistic markings, but to use them as markers of our identifications and our identities. While some of these markings are material (like pies), others are less so (like memories or unknown/unnoticed histories) but no less influential to our thinking and our acting.

This issue of *JCACS* is developed around the motif “Knowing Bodies.” All the writing attempts to represent and interpret an understanding of the complex ways biological, phenomenological, cultural, and social bodies become organized as epistemic bodies. What does it mean to know? What are our responsibilities as persons who know? What happens when certainty about knowing is interrupted?

In each issue of *JCACS* we republish writing that has had a significant impact on curriculum scholarship in Canada. Whenever possible, we also try to include a retrospective by the author of that article as well as a biographical essay on the featured author.

In this issue, we are pleased to republish an article by Antoinette Oberg entitled “Supervision as a Creative Act,” which was originally published in 1989 in the *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*. In that article, Oberg explains her own work with practicing teachers, suggesting that the act of supervising can become a generative process of discovery. When teaching and learning are premised on creation rather than dissemination of knowledge, the roles and practices of teachers and learners shift. The goal of the relationship between teacher and learner is not so much to represent what is already known but, rather, to engage in the process of reinventing self-knowledge and images.

In her retrospective on that article, Antoinette suggests that “My teaching proceeds as a creative engagement within my teaching environment, propelled not by a preset agenda but rather by paying attention and responding in a way that seems fitting, and my researching proceeds similarly, by continuously paying attention to this process of engaging.” Those who have been teaching or researching for any period of time understand that what Oberg is describing requires practiced skills of relationship building, noticing, interpreting and, most important, of being prepared to put up with ambiguity. As Oberg has explained, good teaching is mostly about “bearing witness” to students’ inquiries.

In her biographical essay, entitled “Antoinette Oberg: A Real Teacher...and An Organic but not so Public Intellectual...”, Cynthia Chambers shows why it is so difficult to discern the quality of good teaching, when quality is not measured by what the student has learned about what is already known. In describing the teaching and researching of Oberg, Chambers shows how good teaching is more a matter of creating conditions where the students are able to learn what needs to be learned. This is a difficult sort of teaching skill to develop. In order for this learning to develop the teacher needs to be able to be both widely knowledgeable and, at the same time, must be prepared to continually dissolve her own ego structures so that those of the students might unfold. As Chambers suggests: “What Antoinette brings to her interactions with her students (and to her research as well) is her deep curiosity about, and interest in, the world and the word.”

The thing about pies is that the fluted edges of the crust are made by pinching the dough with one’s fingers. Pies literally contain finger marks. Most pie makers also have their unique ways of making holes in the top crust for steam to escape. My mother would cut out a star shape and then place the cut out star off center on the crust. Her trademark—two stars on every pie. No wonder we cried when we saw them.

What happens when institutional authority asserts itself within the context of research? Who decides how and/or when memory work can be used as critical inquiry? In “Research that Matters: Finding a Path with Heart,” Cynthia Chambers suggests that “when done well, autobiographical inquiry can be profoundly ethical. When the researcher/writer’s life is the site of the inquiry, not the topic of the inquiry, the research makes visible and audible the complicated interconnections between the topic of the writer’s gaze, and her ideas, values and beliefs, as well as the feelings she attaches to each of these.” Developing her thesis by describing a situation she and her graduate student, Michelle Bertie-Holthe, encountered with University of Lethbridge administration over autobiographical details contained in a graduate thesis, Chambers shows how ethical research demands an

attention to the complex and complicit ways researchers find themselves implicated in stories that must be told, but not without consequences. Finding a path with heart, suggests Chambers, means engaging in ethical practices that can also be deeply troubling and unsettling.

In an interview on CBC radio, Shelagh Rogers asks Anne Michaels what propels her creative work, specifically what inspired her to do the ten years of research that yielded her novel *Fugitive Pieces*. While this is not an exact quote, she said something like: "I'm doing what we all must do: try to make sense of our relationship to our parents." Easier said than done. Really, easier not done. It seems that the small stories, what Lyotard (1989) has called *les petits recits*, are elusive, difficult to discern and make available for interpretation. It is much easier to interpret one's experience using the meta-narrative: this is, what it's like to be a man, a woman, a parent, a child, a teacher, a student, a human being. It seems that learning to discern our relationships to that which preceded us occurs best at the edges of things.

In *Edmonton Pentimento: Re-reading History in the Case of the Papaschase Cree* Dwayne Trevor Donald offers a re-presentation of events surrounding the appropriation of land from the Papaschase band during the early days of the development of the city of Edmonton. Utilizing a form of literary *métissage* as a research frame, Donald creates a text that asks "writers and readers to creatively reflect upon the relationships that exist among the social, cultural, and historical *milieux* and *persona* experiences of individuals living in societies coming to terms with the history of colonialism." In so doing Donald offers reading experiences that are both historical and literary—ones that raise important questions: How do ancestors of Aboriginal and non Aboriginals respond to the situation of the Papaschase Cree in Edmonton? What is our ethical obligation to know and to act upon our knowing?

In "Houscleaning" Lorri Neilsen Glenn invites the reader into the borderlands of personal history and memory, showing how the small stories of remembered experience are ordered by the usually not noticed artifacts of experience and by rituals of noticing and remembering. What is the child's obligation to create opportunities for the parent, the caregiver to offer interpretations of the past? Can the child bear the responsibility of a knowing that cannot act upon itself, that cannot alter the ways in which experience has made its mark on the biological body? What are the rituals of practice that might organize intergenerational knowing and how can these be considered an essential part of our personal and cultural knowledge?

Truth be known, I've eaten better pies. I can't claim that my mother was the best pie maker. A few years ago she confessed that when she immigrated to Canada from Germany in the 1950s, she didn't really even know how to cook. A problem for someone who was sponsored by a farm family who expected her to cook meals for entire farm crews. The story of learning to make pies from the farmer's wife and the

story of learning to avoid the farmer's sexual advances become entangled. Amazing that she continued to make pies.

As Neilsen Glenn shows, housecleaning depends upon having a place that organizes one's identity and identifications, language being one such place. What happens when there is no place? In "Being Homeless: Female Subjectivity and Difference" Susan Casey Walsh "investigates the potential of a metonymical female subjectivity as a site for being & knowing differently." Informed by her work with a research group of nine women who met over the course of a year to explore their experiences of fear and pain in teaching, Walsh's writing shows the complex and complicit ways language functions to both produce and interrupt normative conceptions of female subjectivity, particularly as these are organized by discourses of teachers and teaching. Walsh raises difficult and important questions for educators: Where is 'home' for women, and what is a 'safe' space? How do women experience space? What is female subjectivity? How is language implicated? How might such thinking be productive for curriculum, for pedagogical practice?

Learning to tell and re-tell stories are the focus of two connected articles, the first by Susan Dion, and the second co-authored by Susan Dion and her brother Michael Dion. In "(Re)telling to Disrupt: Aboriginal People and Stories of Canadian History" and "The Braiding Histories Stories" Dion both explains and shows why and how her and her brother Michael's project of (re)telling stories help both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians better understand the historical substance and significance of the events of colonization. These (re)tellings are fraught with both difficulty and possibility. As Dion suggests, "Engaging with the stories is intended to provoke my reading audience to rethink their understanding of themselves, of Aboriginal people, and themselves in relation with Aboriginal people." As literary forms, "The Braiding Histories Stories" require readers to engage in readerly identifications which, as Roland Barthes (1974) has suggested, requires a kind of cultural writing: Who does the text ask the reader to be? For both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal readers, Dion's stories ask the reader to bear witness and, as well, to engage in the ethical practice of interpreting what this knowing might mean to one's thinking and acting.

Of course, one must not assume that telling a story will in any way interrupt normative understanding. As Phelan and Luu explain in their article "Learning Difference in Teacher Education: A Conversation," what can be known is limited by what can be perceived. Drawing on their experiences as a prospective teacher of Colour and a White teacher educator, the authors use a discourse analysis to untangle the complex ways in which normative patterns of thinking, speaking and acting are produced and reproduced in the teacher education classroom. Developing their analysis around four discourses—desire, deficiency,

denial, and difficulty—Phelan and Luu show how good intentions become hijacked by habits of mind that are structured by particular uses of language. They show that while teacher educators have sought to include narrative experiences of the “other” in teacher education curriculum, there is simply no direct correspondence between language and experience. The challenging task for teacher educators who are interested in helping students to “learn difference” is to create opportunities for perceptions to be shaken. It seems that there is no direct route to this kind of understanding.

Knowing anything (including one’s identity) depends on one’s ability to continually interpret and re-interpret one’s relations to others and to one’s contexts. While processes of creating are continuous, understanding of these processes is not well known, not even in educational contexts. In her article “Attunement to the Creating Process in Teaching and Learning” Margaret Macintyre Latta describes and analyzes her research with teachers and students at the Creative Arts Center at Milton Williams School in Calgary, Alberta. Creative work, argues Latta, is developed around certain qualities of engagement: attentiveness, personal involvement, emotional commitment, felt freedom, dialogue, inquiry guided, projection, self-consciousness. Most of all, the work of creative production depends upon the creator’s ability to understand and tolerate fragility. This is tricky and uneasy work. As Latta explains, “The character of fragility makes people nervous.”

Only recently have I (Dennis) attempted to make pies. According to my mother’s Everywoman’s Cookbook (1951) the most important thing about making the dough is to not over handle it. Too much handling makes a tough crust. Really, there’s a fine line between a great and mediocre pie. One needs to learn how to feel the dough. It can’t be explained.

Most of what we know, it seems, can’t be explained, isn’t even available to perception. And even what is experienced finds its way to consciousness, it can’t always be represented, much less translated. As Jérôme Proulx shows in his paper “Enactivism ou la Théorie cognitive de la Personnification: Une tentative pour mieux comprendre notre activité langagière,” acts of translating show the impermanence and fragility of language. A Québec Francophone studying in an Anglophone university, Proulx elaborates on the complexities and intricacies underpinning the conceptual web of meanings of the languages, showing how one does not move simply or easily from one conceptual web to the other. For Proulx, acts of translation are also acts of shifting identities. Informed by an enactivist understanding of learning (see Davis, 2004), Proulx explicitly shows the complex ways knowing, being, and doing are both produced and interrupted by language.

In “On learning to write her name: an example of research informed by literary anthropology” Linda Laidlaw shows how small

events of emergent literacy can become interpretive watersheds for understanding the historical and contextual complexity of identity. Developed around an analysis of a young child's ("Tara") refusal to own adult markers of literacy identification, Laidlaw shows how language and literacy practices function to both create and disrupt one's place in the world. Elaborating the work of anthropologists Clifford and Marcus (1986) who suggest that "Even the best ethnographic texts—serious true fictions—are systems, or economies, of truth. Power and history work through them, in ways their authors cannot fully control" (p. 7). And, in curious ways, even the most well-intentioned anthropologically informed ethnographic work cannot avoid the problems and possibilities of interpretation. As Laidlaw explains, researchers can only represent their interpretations of what it was like for them to be involved with their subjects of inquiry.

We round out this issue of *JCACS* with two book reviews. Helen Harper discusses the edited collection by Clare O'Farrell, Daphne Meadmore, Erica McWilliam and Colin Symes entitled *Taught Bodies* and A. Nettie Campbell offers a review of D.D. Liston's book *Joy as a Metaphor of Convergence*.

In Harper's review of what she terms a collection comprised of "an interdisciplinary romp through the school and university classroom, the art gallery, the theatre, popular crime fiction, the cinema, and of course, the boudoir, exposing and exploring the body present and produced in these contexts", she makes the important point that "while we may be convinced that the body is indeed present in pedagogical encounters, certainly more than we ever imagined, or more to the point, than we would dare admit, the question of why this might be significant, why the teaching/learning body appears and disappears, and how we might better understand this, seems to slip away in efforts to simply reveal the body." It is our hope that the collection of articles we offer to readers in this issue of *JCACS* begins to address Harper's observation, and that in so doing, this work, as a 'body of knowing', speaks not only to the presence, but to the significance of knowing bodies in teaching and learning.

My partner and I recently bought a house in the country. The vendors want to leave behind the huge "Empire" freezer (circa 1950s) that is in the basement, identical to the one held my mother's pies. Big enough for a few bodies. I tell the realtor that it has to go.

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